

Statement of Introduction Representative Edward Markey (D-MA) Introducing “The Ronald Reagan Alzheimer’s Breakthrough Act of 2004”

Mr. Speaker, the race to find a cure for Alzheimer’s disease is more urgent than ever. Four and a half million Americans, including one in 10 people over age 65 and nearly half of those over 85, have Alzheimer’s disease. Unless science finds a way to prevent or cure this terrible illness, nearly 16 million Americans will have Alzheimer’s disease by the year 2050.

Today I am introducing The Ronald Reagan Alzheimer’s Breakthrough Act of 2004, to honor President Ronald Reagan and his forward thinking in establishing an awareness of this disease and his guidance in directing the National Institute on Aging to establish the Alzheimer’s Disease Centers. I am joined by Representative Christopher Smith, Co-chair of the Congressional Alzheimer’s Taskforce, Representatives Robert Menendez, Sheila Jackson Lee, Gene Green, Dale Kildee, Donald A. Manzullo, Karen McCarthy, Marty Meehan, Richard E. Neal, Ron Kind, Patrick Kennedy, and Jim McDermott.

The Ronald Reagan Alzheimer’s Breakthrough Act of 2004 expands the federal government’s efforts to find new ways to prevent, treat, and care for patients with Alzheimer’s. This bill focuses on enhancing our research efforts by authorizing NIH’s Preventive Initiative, which directs NIH to identify possible preventive interventions and conduct clinical trials to test their effectiveness. This bill authorizes significant increase in funding for the National Institute on Aging and cooperative clinical research at the National Institute on Aging (NIA) to improve the existing clinical trial infrastructure, develop new ways to design clinical trials, and make it easier for patients to enroll.

The bill also focuses efforts to help the caregivers of Alzheimer’s patients. Presently, care giving comes at enormous physical, emotional, and financial sacrifice. One in eight Alzheimer caregivers becomes ill or injured as a direct result of care giving, and older caregivers are three times more likely to become clinically depressed than other in their age group. Research is needed to find better ways to help caregivers bear this tremendous, at times overwhelming responsibility. This bill reauthorizes the Alzheimer’s Demonstration Grant Program. These grants allow states to provide services like home care, respite care, and day care to patients and families, with Alzheimer’s disease.

Mr. Speaker the best way to fight this disease and reduce the number of patients who suffer from Alzheimer’s disease is to find ways to prevent it before it starts. Investments we make now in Alzheimer’s disease and aging research mean longer, healthier lives for all of us. If we can delay the onset of Alzheimer’s disease by even 5 years, it would save this country billions of dollars—and would improve the lives of millions of families. Congress must act now to strengthen the federal commitment to preventive Alzheimer’s and to finding a cure for this devastating disease and provide for caregivers.”